# The Encounter Between Francis of Assisi and Sultan Malik-al-Kamil, and its Relevance for Muslim-Christian Relations and Contemporary International Relations*

Scott M. Thomas
University of Bath, United Kingdom

> **'**The Christmas opening of *Brother Sun, Sister Moon* was in some ways worse than I'd anticipated [Franco Zeffirelli's film on Francis of Assisi was released December 2, 1972]. The Vietnam War protests had intensified; this was the time of flag-burning and guilt. I went to the previews and watched the reactions. Some were ugly; there was mocking laughter at the idea of love and gentleness …. [the film] went totally against the grain of the new cynicism …. Needless to say, the critics did not flinch from putting in the knife …. [The Easter opening of the film in London] was greeted with no less enthusiasm, though with less derision than in New York. As expected, the critics were merciless. The only joy I have had out of the whole business is the affection the film has found among those in the world were faith means more than supposed sophistication. Since it was made, not a day has gone by when it is not shown somewhere in the world and now it has become a cult film.'[1]
>
> - Franco Zeffirelli

> "The Jesus to whom Saint Francis appealed in his call for a poor and giving rather than a powerful and grasping church was not the Historical Jesus but the Jesus of the Gospels. One must wonder why this Jesus is not also the 'real' Jesus for those who declare a desire for religious truth, and theological integrity, and honest history."[2]
>
> - Luke Timothy Johnson

> "The real world begins here…. What we think about these events and possibilities, and what we think we can *do* about them, depends in a fundamental sense on *how* we think about them [e.g. the war in Bosnia and genocide in Rwanda, world wars, and the prospects for world politics]. In short, our thinking about the 'real' world, and hence our *practices*, is directly related to our *theories*, so as people interested in and concerned about the real world, we must be interested in and concerned about theory: What are the *legacies* of *past*

* Scott M. Thomas is Associate Professor of International Relations at the University of Bath, United Kingdom. He is the author of *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*, Foreword by Desmond Tutu (Palgrave, 2005), and is senior academic advisor to the Religion and International Relations Section of the International Studies Association (ISA), and a contributing editor of *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*. His articles on the Franciscans include "The Way of St. Francis? Catholic Approaches to Christian-Muslim Relations and Interreligious Dialogue,' *The Down Side Review*, 126, 444 (2008): 157-168; "St. Francis and Islam: A Critical Appraisal for Contemporary, Muslim–Christian Relations, Middle East Politics and, International Relations," *The Downside Review*, 136, 1 (2018): 3-28; "A Trajectory Toward the Periphery: Francis of Assisi, Louis Massignon, Pope Francis, and Muslim–Christian Relations," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 16,1 (2018): 16-36. An earlier version of some of the concepts and analysis of this article inspired by my research on the encounter between St. Francis and Sultan Malik al-Kamil, in dialogue with Fabio Petito appeared in a briefing paper for the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and has been published. Fabio Petito and Scott M. Thomas, "Encounter, Dialogue, and Knowledge: Italy as a Special Case of Religious Engagement in Foreign Policy,' *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 13, 2 (2015): 40-51.

[1] Henry Kissinger, President Richard Nixon's National Security Advisor, who conducted for the Americans the Paris Peace Talks to end the Vietnam War, says in his memoirs, 'For me December 1972 was a melancholy period. Whatever happened now, it was likely that the end of the war would in divisiveness parallel the conduct of it.' Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979), p. 1446. Zeffirelli recounts he was asked to go to Lima, Peru as part of a trip to Latin America to attend a showing of the film, and because of technical problems with the airplane he landed at the airport at 11.00 pm. This was five hours later than expected, and still 'a vast crowd was waiting at the airport. They burst into cheers and applause and began to chant the theme from the film as I was led towards them.' Franco Zeffirelli, *Franco Zeffirelli: The Autobiography* (London: Arena, 1986), 265-267. Patricia Appelbaum in her book, *St. Francis of America: How a Thirteenth-Century Friar Became America's Most Popular Saint* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), examines Zeffirelli's film, but she perpetuates the clichés about it regarding hippies, drop-outs, ecology, and the counterculture (pp. 110-135). Sadly, the film was also marketed saying, Francis was 'history's first drop-out,' which he wasn't.

[2] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (New York: Harper: San Francisco, 1997), 177. For a further elaboration of his arguments, and those used in section 2 see, Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (Augsburg/Fortress Press, 2010, third edition).

> theories? *Whose facts* have been most important in shaping our ideas? *Whose voices* are overlooked [i.e. the concept of ontology]? Can we know and how can we know it [i.e. the concept of epistemology]? Where is theory going [how do different concepts of theory indicate different purposes for what theory is, what it is for, for whom it is for, and who benefits from different concepts of theory]? Who are *we* [i.e. the concept of identity]? The real world is constituted by the *dominant answers* to these and other theoretical questions" (emphasis added).[3]
>
> - Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski

Why should *The Muslim World* seek to commemorate the encounter between Francis of Assisi and Sultan Malik-al-Kamil (1180-1238) during the siege of Damietta, Egypt at the height of the Fifth Crusade (1217-1221)? It can be asked, was it a 'major event,' was it a 'minor event,' or *was* it even an 'event' at all? For their Arab contemporaries, Gabrieli has argued, the encounter does not appear to have been an event. Francis was simply seen as another *rahib* (monk), or priest, preaching the gospel to the Muslims, and so they did not record it.[4] All kinds of things, all kinds of social activities happen in the world, but not all of them are events. What are called 'events,' are *always* socially, politically, and religiously - or even, also economically, constructed (historically these have often not been separate categories), and they are really *narratively* constructed - by some actors, with some interest, and for some purpose to indicate the event's meaning and significance for their time. This was true in the past – regarding events in the ancient world, the Middle Ages, it is true of all ages, and it is also true in the present age – regarding events in contemporary international relations.[5]

---

[3] Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski, "Introduction," in Steve Smith, Ken Booth, Marysia Zalewski (eds.), *International theory: positivism & beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-10.

[4] Francesco Gabrieli, "S. Francesco e l'Oriente islamico,' in Roberto Rusconi (ed.), *Espansione del francescanesimo tra Occidente e Oriente nel secolo XIII* (Assisi, 1979), pp. 119-121, and Chiara Frugoni*, Francesco e 'le terre dei non cristiani* (Milan, 2012), pp. 22-23, cited in Barbara Bombi, 'The Fifth Crusade and the conversion of the Muslims,' in E.J. Mylod, Guy Perry, Thomas W. Smith, and Jan Vandeburie (eds.), *The Fifth Crusade in Context: The crusading movement in the early thirteenth century* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 68-91, esp. pp. 71, 87. According to Chiara Frugoni, Francis's journey to the Holy Land was even omitted in some *Franciscan* sources - the legends Franciscan Minister-General Crescenzio of Iesi (1244-1247) gathered for the meeting of the general chapter in Genoa (1244) in spite of the fact he initiated a systematic search for documents on the life of St. Francis, and of the first days of the Order of Friars Minor (this is related to internal politics - the early tensions in order between the early and later followers of St. Francis, with the earlier ones wanting to follower a stricter version of poverty). There is only a brief mention of Francis's attempt to travel to Morocco, and his encounter with the Sultan in Thomas of Celeno's 'Legend for Use in the Choir' (1230-1232), in Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (eds.), *Francis of Assisi, Early Documents: The Saint*, vol. I (New York: New City Press, 1999); hereafter, FA ED I: 319-326, section III.

[5] Raymond Cohn, Professor of International Relations, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, who has written the key book, *Negotiating Across Cultures: International Communications in an Interdependent World* (U.S. Institute for Peace, 1997), says when he decided to research the relations between the monks and religious communities in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, he was influenced by the *events* in news media regarding, "the war between the churches, a familiar tale of religious immoderation." However, "I discovered that this was not the most significant or even interesting story," and in the news media the "expectations of violence have tended to reproduce a grossly distorted view of the church," and "something both unexpected and momentous had taken place at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, "which was not encapsulated in a single newsworthy *event* and did not cater to existing preconceptions, it seemed to have gone largely unnoticed by the outside world" – the unprecedented cooperation between the churches over many decades, even while rivalry and competition remained, and so the real *event* is an account of "how adversaries worked together in a common cause" (emphasis added.). Raymond Cohn, *Saving the Holy Sepulchre: How Rival*

Asking this question, and in this way sets up the main argument of this article – to bring more clearly into focus what critical approaches to the theory of international relations (i.e. the Frankfurt School), and social constructivism may be able to contribute to the study of this encounter, and to Franciscan Studies, especially since many Catholics, Franciscans, Muslims – and, many people of good will, are concerned with the meaning, significance, and relevance of this encounter for contemporary peacemaking, Muslim-Christian relations, and international relations.[6]

However, how can this be done? If the purpose of studying this encounter is to determine its contemporary meaning, significance, and relevance, then this also raises questions about how the encounter relates to the study of the *theory* of international relations. It is this missing dimension, which is the subject of this article – the relationship between the scholarly study of the encounter between St. Francis and Sultan al-Kamil in Franciscan Studies, and medieval studies, and the theory of international relations. Moreover, the intersection between these scholarly disciplines – Franciscan Studies, medieval studies, and international relations is especially interesting in relation to the encounter at this time. What is often called the pluralist school in crusade historiography is in some ways similar to the 'religious turn' in the study of international relations. The pluralist school of crusade historiography has an emphasis on religious doctrines, devotion, and emotion or religious experience – crusade vows, crusade privileges, sermons, liturgy, and the penitential element in crusading,[7] and this seems to reflect similar concerns to take religious ideas, values, and motives seriously with the rise of the religious turn in the study of international relations since the early 1990s.[8] What is called the pluralist school is not so much a turn towards, as much as it is a turning away from earlier ideas about the crusades in the 19th and early 20th centuries, i.e. the ideas by liberals and Marxists, who argued crusaders mainly had economic or materialistic motives – in which religious or spiritual motives (such as piety, penance, indulgences, etc.) were dismissed as 'epiphenomenal,' i.e. only a

---

*Christians Came Together to Rescue Their Holiest Shrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. xi-xii.

[6] These articles argue it is most likely Francis opposed the Fifth Crusade, he opposed the principle of the crusades, and he saw preaching and peaceful conversion as an alternative to the crusades. He also held these views as a loyal, orthodox, Catholic committed to the Catholic Church and its mission in the world (see footnote 76). Scott M. Thomas, "The Way of St. Francis? Catholic Approaches to Christian-Muslim Relations and Interreligious Dialogue,' *The Downside Review*, 126, 444 (2008): 157-168; "St. Francis and Islam: A Critical Appraisal for Contemporary Muslim–Christian Relations, Middle East Politics and, International Relations," *The Downside Review*, 136, 1 (2018): 3-28.

[7] Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London: Continuum, 2009, second edition), pp. 1-12.

[8] Scott M. Thomas, "The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Study of World Politics", *Millennium: journal of international studies* (London School of Economics), 24, 2 (1995): 289- 299, Scott M. Thomas, "Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously: the global resurgence of religion and the transformation of international society," *Millennium*, 29, 3 (2000): 815-841, Fabio Petito and P. Hatzopouilos (eds.), *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile* (Palgrave, 2003), Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*, Foreword by Desmond Tutu (Palgrave, 2005), Jack Snyder (ed.), *Religion and International Relations Theory* (Columbia University Press, 2011), Timothy Samuel Shah, Alfred Stepan, Monica Duffy Toft (eds.), *Rethinking Religion and World Affairs* (Oxford, 2012), Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God's Century: resurgence religion and global Politics* (Norton, 2011).

covering for what were – and still are, the 'real motives' in history – power politics or political realism, i.e. power, land, wealth, and booty, and so the crusades are examples of proto-colonialism and proto-imperialism.[9] Similarly, the religious turn in the study of international relations has taken religious ideas, values, and motives seriously, rather than also consider them only as epiphenomenal factors (i.e. ideological factors), which need to be explained away, rather than becoming a part of an actual explanation or understanding of social action in international relations – in the past, and in the present world.

In other words, early crusade historiography, from the perspective of international relations theory, it is all about 'structure' – the larger social, political – and, mainly, economic structures, the dominant narratives, which determine our lives – in the past, in the Middle Ages, but also in the present (hence the reading backwards *into* history of the modern concerns with proto-colonialism, proto-imperialism, and other materialistic social and economic forces). What early crusade historiography does not seem to be about was 'agency,' i.e. the limited ability of a variety of actors in the past (individuals, social movements, etc.) to influence their own lives, or to influence the world around them. So, the story, the narrative in early crusade historiography, was in this way also about *our* limited ability as individuals, or in social groups, and in social movements to influence *our* lives, *our* politics – and *our* ability to influence contemporary events in international relations. We are confronted – in the past, and in the present, by empires, great powers, and emerging great powers, who determine the main ideas, doctrines, events, and the *dominant* narratives, interpretations of what is going on in the world, including our own world (this is the reason for the opening quotation on post-positivist theory in international relations).

The pluralist school of crusade historiography seems like a breath of fresh air – with its emphasis on a variety of actors, motives, etc. and a variety of theatres of war, and this provides perhaps a new optic – a return to agency, even given, or within, the constraints of history, for evaluating the debate over the role of the laity as religious actors, i.e. 'the evangelical awakening,' its relationship to changing views on peace, mission, conversion, and the crusades, as part of the call to return to the apostolic life in the thirteenth century (i.e. a return to the life of Jesus and the early apostles as portrayed in the gospels, which Francis of Assisi responded to, and is mentioned in Johnson's opening quotation).

What critical theorists call 'problem-solving theory' is theory as it is used in positivist, mainstream international relations to explain (allegedly objectively) the workings of the existing international system. It uses the existing frameworks of diplomatic or political institutions to solve, or at least manage more effectively, foreign policy problems in the interests of the great powers, or emerging great powers in the existing international order. What they call 'theory as negative critique' probes why and how the world came to be divided into states, how the state came to monopolize our vision of loyalty, identity, and meaning, and then how the relations between states in a states-system or type of international society came into existence, spread around the world, as an accumulation of social and diplomatic practices, and also as a body of thought (international theory), and whether it

[9] Jonathan Ridley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades?* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2002, third edition), x-xiii; Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014, third edition), pp. 1-20.

should remain this way (section 1).[10] Theory as negative critique might also be called prophetic critique since the 'prophetic imagination' – going back to the biblical prophets, common in many ways among the 'Abrahamic religions' (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), seeks to evoke and nurture a greater awareness of the way the dominant culture constructs the social world, its power relations, and its dominant, authoritative conception of reality, and knowledge of what is going on in the world. The prophetic imagination offers an alternative interpretation of reality, which also can be recognized by theorists of critical theory and social constructivists since it criticises the way theory – as problem-solving theory, uses what Brueggemann calls the 'language of managed reality' to express how the dominant culture, and dominant great powers support the existing domestic and international order and its existing narratives, interpretations, and legitimations (see also section 1 for critical theory's concept of theory as everyday social practice).[11] However, the purpose of critical theory in international relations is "not just to explain the world but to change it."[12]

Social constructivism – which has also significantly influenced the study of medieval history (section 2) led to a recognition of the possibility of 'agency' by challenging the existing production of knowledge - with new forms of knowledge to understand and interpret what was going on in international relations. These ideas contributed to the activism of civil society groups and new social movements – first in opposing cruise missiles in Europe in the 1980s, and then in overcoming communism in the 1990s (section 2).[13]

Section one begins to revisit the Franciscan story from the perspective of international relations theory. Firstly, it begins to show how social constructivism in international relations theory may offer a new optic for recognizing and appreciating the ways Francis offered a counter-cultural critique of Christendom (perhaps, not so readily apparent in the conventional Franciscan narrative); and secondly, it establishes the elements of a 'Franciscan' model, or pattern of Muslim-Christian

---

[10] Robert W. Cox, 'Social forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,' *Millennium* 10, 2 (1981): 126-155; Marysia Zalewski, 'All These Theories Yet the Bodies Keep Piling Up: Theory, Theorists, Theorizing' in Smith, Booth, and Zalewski (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 340-353.

[11] Walter Brueggemann states, 'The language of empire,' – in the ancient Near East, the Middle Ages, and in the present, 'is surely the language of managed reality.' Brueggemann sets out this social constructivist interpretation of the prophets, and biblical prophecy in the ancient Near East as a more radical way of seeing or interpreting the world than prophesy as mainly predicting the future (conservative view), or mainly proclaiming social justice (liberal view). He explicitly states this interpretation of the prophetic imagination is informed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966); Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic* Imagination (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, second edition, 2001), 1-19, esp. 3, 64, 130. It demonstrates why theory matters, and why seeing the world differently, interpreting what is going on in the world differently, is already a way of beginning to change it. Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (Palgrave, 2005), p. 250.

[12] Robert W. Cox, 'The Point is Not Just to Explain the World but to Change It,' in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, eds. (Oxford, 2007), 84-93.

[13] Christian Reus-Smit, "Realist and Resistance Utopias: Community, Security and Political Action in the New Europe," *Millennium*, 21, 1 (1992): 1-28; Scott M. Thomas and Anthony O'Mahony "Postsecularity and the Contending Visions of the European Political Imagination in International Relations," in Luca Mavelli (ed.), *Towards a Postsecular International Politics: New Forms of Community, Identity, and Power* (London: Palgrave, 2014), pp. 105-128.

relations, and international relations – encounter, conversion, knowledge, and transformation. Section two argues it is possible to establish a relationship between the purposes of the Franciscan Question, i.e. the investigation of the historical Francis, and the purposes of critical theory and social constructivism in the theory of international relations. The reason is that both are concerned – in the past, and in the present, contrary to objective or positivist approaches to both historiography, or the events in history, and to the study of international relations, with *interpreting* events with multiple sources, interests, and perspectives. Both forms of inquiry point to the limits of historical knowing, and the need for historical reflection, and the dialectics of choice – which is as concerned with the present as it is the past since the very nature of what is 'history,' and what is 'historical' inevitably engages with identity, memory, and agency regarding the concerns of contemporary politics and international relations (so all of us are also faced with a similar dialectics of choice which confronted St. Francis and Sultan al-Kamil in understanding our world). It is here where the contemporary meaning and relevance of the encounter between St. Francis and Sultan al-Kamil can be found – and, not in inspiring moral tales or lessons of history (Francis as a peacemaker, or the precursor of interreligious dialogue, etc.). Sections three and four explain in greater detail why this is the case – and develop a radical 'Franciscan' model, or pattern for a social epistemology and social ontology in international relations theory which clearly, or hopefully sets this encounter and the future of Muslim-Christian relations within a deeper Franciscan appreciation of what it means to live faithfully and critically in the pluralistic and globalizing world of the twenty-first century.

## (1)
## Towards Another Way of Living in the World:
## Francis of Assisi and his Countercultural Critique of Christendom

What is most striking from the viewpoint of the study of international relations is that Francis of Assisi's transformative life story (what is often called his 'conversion') begins with a war - the main type of event that led to the creation of international relations as a discipline after World War I. His transformative life story took place in medieval Europe at a time of tremendous social, political, and economic changes: (i) the early medieval rise of capitalism and the market economy (as something more than a new type of economic system of organisation, but also the early rise of the *culture* of capitalism); and (ii) the transition from a medieval 'mixed-actor' type of international system (i.e. a variety of types of political actors) to new types of political actors - the rise of the *communes* or city-states, and the mimetic rivalry between them, which eventually led to the Renaissance city-state type of international system.

Francis's life-story began – in so far as it can be empirically observed, with the war between the city-states or communes in the geographical – rather than political territory of Italy. Francis, before he was a saint, was a soldier, and then a prisoner of war in Assisi's war against Perugia (1202) in the Italian city-state system. Francis is not the only soldier who renounced war, and became a saint (e.g. Martin of Tours was one of Francis's mimetic models, and Ignatius of Loyola the founder of the Jesuits is another). What is far more significant is the prolonged period of war – *internally* between

factions, and *externally* between Assisi and Perugia. In spite of the peace treaty (1203), there was *still* an on-going, horrific, bloody, and violent period of raids, looting, and armed combat for many years (Fortini does not spare us the details and stories omitted in other accounts).[14]

Historians who focus on the peace treaty, Fortini argues, underplay the persistence of anarchy and violence. This "minimizes the importance of Assisi's internal *and* external war on the origins of the new Franciscan movement. The war accompanied Francis's spiritual crisis, as well as that of his first companions," and "it continued until the approbation of the rule [i.e. the *Early Rule*, 1209/10-1220], and may well have been the factor that determined its existence."[15] The persistent factional fighting *within* the emerging communes (city-states), and the wars *between* them, and rise of early capitalism, a money economy, growing trade (e.g. Francis and his father often attended the trade fairs, especially in Provence), and growing wealth, poverty, and inequality all characterized these turbulent times. So, for Francis – and, eventually, his early brothers, *something was profoundly wrong with the way they were living*.[16]

The concept of "international anarchy' is often considered to be the central, universal, and perennial problem – the main *structural* problem, confronted by all states in the international system in the mainstream social scientific study of international relations scholars. This is considered to be the case not only in contemporary international relations, but also throughout history - in every historic type of states-system or international system (including the Middle Ages, with its 'mixed-actor' type of international system, see section 2). Anarchy in this sense does not mean chaos, but the point of the concept is to help scholars investigate how 'international order' can be achieved with the lack of a central political authority (like a world government), and this is why all states are confronted with the fear, insecurity, and uncertainly which makes war, and the preparation for war, an almost inevitable part of any international system (in this case war within, and between the emerging communes or city-states, which would become the Italian city-state type of international system of the Italian Renaissance).

However, social constructivists have argued since the 1980s this is not the case. It offers an inaccurate description of states, what their identities are, and how they are constructed, and so power politics or political realism offers a distorted way of looking at the world in the study of international relations. International anarchy, the condition of international relations with no overarching political authority - is "what states make of it," i.e. states – have *agency*, even within structural constraints, they can decide what to do, they can be rivals, friends, or enemies, it all depends on *how* they decide

---

[14] Arnoldo Fortini (1899-1970), a historian, advocate, and poet, was mayor of Assisi before and during World War II. He also held the Chair in Franciscan Studies at the University of Perugia. He had full access to Assisi's historical archives to write his biography of St. Francis, which Hugo argues can be classified as primary sources, even though his *interpretations* of them need to be carefully evaluated William R. Hugo, OFM, Cap., *Studying the Life of Saint Francis of Assisi: A Beginner's Workbook* (New York: New City Press, 2011, second edition), 50, 103-104, 121127, 130, 149; Gemma Fortini and Finbarr Conroy, 'The Contribution of Arnoldo Fortini to Franciscan Studies,' *Franciscan Studies*, 43 (1983): 261-278.

[15] Arnoldo Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, A Translation of *Nova Vita de San Francesco* by Helen Moak (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 166.

[16] "Something is profoundly wrong with the way we live today" Tony Judt, *Ill Fares the Land: A Treatise On Our Present Discontents* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), first sentence, p. 1.

to mutually engage, encounter, and respond to each other in the international system.[17] Constructivists probe, or indicate how there can be another way – than the dominant narrative propagated by the global great powers, to interpret and understand what is going on in the world, and so another way of living in the world. The article shows, however, by the way it adapts critical theory and social constructivism, how St. Francis, his encounter with Sultan al-Kamil, and the early Franciscan tradition represents a more radical understanding, or interpretation of what it means to live critically and faithfully in the world – going beyond 'the Other' as a friend, rival, or enemy, for what inspired the title of Zeffirelli's film was the radical Franciscan social ontology of all creatures and creation as siblings related to each other (section 3).

The pluralist school of crusade historiography – with its emphasis on a variety of actors, motives, and a variety of theatres of war, and the way it has provided a new optic – a return to agency, even given, or within, the constraints of history is the link between Franciscan Studies, medieval studies, and the rise of social constructivism in the theory of international relations in the 1980s (section 2). The Cold War, the Vietnam War, and (we now know) the very real threat of nuclear war – with the cruise missile crisis in Europe,[18] led to a growing recognition of the limits to the *idea* of an objective or positivist social scientific understanding of international relations. This was the case precisely because there was something profoundly wrong – ethically, and analytically, with the way these theories and methods – the dominant narratives, were implicated in the production of the existing structures of international power in the international system, the creation of the existing rivalry between the superpowers now threatening the world (there was also the problem for Americans of trying to explain how a global superpower can be defeated by a peasant rebellion led by Vietnamese nationalists).

This section sets out the basis for the rest of the article, and argues Francis and the early Franciscan movement performed the gospel life in a way that demonstrated a cultural – or, really *counter*-cultural critique of Christendom**.**[19] Francis's life story establishes the elements of a holistic and integrated "Franciscan model" of peacemaking, Muslim-Christian relations, interreligious dialogue, and international relations elaborated in this article – encounter, conversion, knowledge,

---

[17] Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (reissued London: Routledge, 2012, University of South Carolina Press, 1989); Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organisation*, 46, 2 (1992): 391-425; Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State,' *American Political Science Review*, 88, 2 (1994): 384-396; Alexander Wendt, *The Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Friedrich Kratochwil, *The Puzzles of Politics: Inquiries into the genesis and transformation of international relations* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[18] "Cockroaches and scorpions: The world almost ended in 1983. A new history of a terrifyingly close shave with nuclear Armageddon," *The Economist*, May 5, 2018, p. 81. Taylor Downing, *1983: Reagan, Andropov and a World on the Brink* (New York: *Little, Brown, 2018.* These events are the subject of *Deutschland '83,* a German TV series available in English in the U.S. and Britain. Gordon Barrass, "*Able Archer 83*: What Were the Soviets Thinking?", *Survival* (International Institute for Strategic Studies), 58, 6 (2016-2017): 7-30.

[19] Lawrence S. Cunningham, *Francis of Assisi: Performing the Gospel Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004). However, Francis's counter-cultural critique of Christendom has to be balanced with another factor, he desired and also received the support of popes - Innocent III, Honorius III, and Gregory IX, who before becoming pope, as Ugolino di Conti, Cardinal Bishop of Ostia, at the special request of Francis, was made Cardinal Protestor of the Order.

and transformation. It all begins with *encounter* - it was these military events – being a soldier, and a prisoner of war, and the *encounter* with Christ, speaking to him from the cross in the dilapidated Church of San Damiano outside Assisi's city walls (the "San Damiano Cross") that sparked Francis's conversion journey. His desire still to be a chivalrous knight – *the* cultural model of success for young men of his day, and after his convalescence, this led him to head for Apulia in southern Italy to join the papal forces against the Holy Roman Empire. He stopped in route in Spoleto where that night he had the famous "Dream of Spoleto," i.e. another *encounter* with Christ, which led him to finally give up his military ambitions (the question in the dream was does he want to follow the heavenly Lord or his liege lord, who is only an earthly prince, and who is really only the servant of the heavenly Lord). He returns to face Assisi's disgrace, dejection, and humiliation, waiting for the new vocation God would show him.

However, it was the dream of Spoleto – which, is a key part of his conversion, occurs in all the early sources, and establishes the Franciscan model set out in this article. The point of the story in the sources, given its framing in terms of the generally accepted societal feudal obligations of the time, is to show his even deeper conversion – his final turning away from his previous way of life in the world. However, few scholars seem to have remarked on how truly radical this story is; and, from a religious and political perspective, or from a theo-political perspective, it is in some ways shocking the story even *exists* in the sources. This becomes clear when it is realised the framing of the dream – is effectively *countercultural* - for it goes *against* the grain of the existing feudal obligations, and the way these obligations were used as part of the standard crusade preaching and propaganda of the time. This is clear from the crusade preaching of Jacques de Vitry who was the greatest preacher of the day. He was already familiar with Francis, and the new Franciscan movement, and saw Francis at Damietta, after he was appointed the new bishop of Acre in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem (1216). In one of his crusade sermons he sets out the standard argument, in the accepted feudal framing of the day, in which going on crusade, or 'taking the Cross' (in the language of the day), was far more than a patriotic duty, it was a religious obligation since the crusade was *as incumbent* on the Christian, as going into military service was *incumbent* upon any vassal in faithful service to his liege lord. However, the dream of Spoleto *breaks* this feudal link, the logic of this feudal link, between the heavenly Lord, and the earthly prince – and, in the dream, God asks Francis, who do you want to serve – the heavenly Lord *or* the earthly prince; whereas, in Vitry's sermon's, their persuasiveness, and the hearers' positive reception of them, depends on their accepting the sermon's *logic* of the hierarchy of feudal obligations (for in the sermons following the earthly prince *is* following the heavenly Lord, and for those who heard the sermon, and those who did take part, saw themselves as faithfully doing their duty to Christ, as they faithfully did their duty to their temporal lord or king).[20] In other words, the dream of Spoleto points *eventually towards Francis's countercultural critique of Christendom, and what becomes the model of his preaching, and the way he performed the gospel*. Francis's radicalism was not the way he directly rejected, or opposed some of the ideas, concepts, and the social practices of Assisi's medieval social world, but the way he performed the gospel *transformed* his use, and the accepted meanings of these concepts and social practices as part of his

[20] Jonathan Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades*, pp. 24-26.

overall challenge to the existing social construction of medieval society (sections 3 and 4).

Francis's life story demonstrates "conversion" was more than a single "event" (e.g. the San Damiano Cross). It was a series of events, responding to his world – the persistence of anarchy, violence, and poverty around him, and his even *deeper* conversions, new *knowledge*, and deeper *transformations* (e.g. "the Dream of Spoleto"), which became central to his concept of peace, and the origins of the new Franciscan movement (e.g. Francis's "peace greeting").

Francis's unexpected *encounter* with the leper, a riskier encounter, was another event, which was pivotal in his conversion journey, and influenced his theology and spirituality.[21] He speaks dramatically about it, which occurred *after* "the Dream of Spoleto," in his *Testament* (1-3), written shortly before he died. Francis did not forget it was through living "among the lepers" that he had understood what the Lord wanted to reveal to him (new knowledge), and so it not surprising he would admonish the brothers later on to "live spiritually" among Muslims (deeper knowledge).[22] This is why some scholars connect the *encounter* with the leper, and his *encounter* with Christ in the event of the *Stigmata* (receiving the wounds of Christ on Mount La Verna) to his *later* encounter with the Sultan al-Kamil.[23]

However, the conversionary elision - going from the leper, to the *Stigmata,* and ultimately to Sultan al-Kamil, is perhaps too one-sided in so far as it focuses on Islam, and Muslim-Christian relations, rather than seeing this encounter as only part of the way Francis performed the gospel life in a *holistic* and *integrative* way, and interpreted what it meant to follow Christ, to perform the gospel life, and to live faithfully in the violent world in which he lived. In some ways this comes about as close as you can get to what critical theorists call "theory as everyday social practice" in international relations. It is a way of bringing together ethically and *analytically* the "everyday politics of global living" – what Francis first experienced as the son of a great merchant in Assisi, in the surrounding communes, and extending to the trade fairs to France he visited with his father. One of the central tasks of critical theory is to be reflective about our everyday social practices – all of us live out a theory of international relations everyday by the way we live our lives, in the way we "act," the choices we make, what we buy, what we consume, what we eat, how we travel, i.e. in our everyday lifestyles we live out "the local politics of world politics."[24]

However, in relation to critical theory, Francis was more than a cultural critic, or even political critic, for the way he practiced peace, and performed the gospel life occurred in a radically holistic, integrative, and challenging way, which scholars of international relations can easily recognize as happening at *all* the levels of analysis: firstly, what happened was Francis's seeking peace *with* God,

---

[21] Steven J. McMichael, 'Francis and the encounter with the Sultan, Michael J.P. Robson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 127-142.
[22] Laurent Gallant, "Francis of Assisi: Forerunner of Interreligious Dialogue: Chapter 16 of the Earlier Rule Revisited," *Franciscan Studies*, 64, 1 (2006): 58-82.
[23] "Francis extended his experience of reconciliation beyond the Christian world to the Muslim world. Just as he went among lepers, he later went among Muslims, and in both cases he went among them in a spirit of peace and compassion" McMichael, 2012, 130). Hoebrichts 1997; Dalarun, Cusato, and Salvati, 2006).
[24] Ken Booth (ed.), *Critical Security and World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005). Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sharing Possessions: What Faith Demands* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011, second edition) reflects this 'Franciscan' message regarding faith, 'local' everyday social practices, and their 'global' implications.

peace with, or *within* himself, so he could become a person of peace - with all creatures and all creation, and with *everyone* – regardless of social class or station (i.e. the individual level of analysis); and, secondly, this is what led him to seek peace *within* the domestic civil politics – the factional violence, poverty, and inequality of the *communes* (e.g. his peacemaking in Arezzo), now emerging as the main form of political community in northern and central Italy at this time (the state and society levels of analysis); and, thirdly, he went seeking peace *between* the warring city-states in the emerging city-state type of international system (moving away from the 'mixed-actor' type of medieval international system), which later came to characterize the Renaissance city-state system (the international system level of analysis); and, finally, or eventually, we went seeking peace *beyond* Italy, beyond the Italian city-state international system – with Franciscan missions to the rest of Europe, and to the Holy Land, what is now called the Middle East, and ultimately leading to the meeting with the Sultan al-Kamil, ostensibly 'the enemy' of Christendom; and, extending even further, Franciscan missions and diplomacy to Asia and the Far East (often not separate types of activities), which also engaged the outer territorial reaches of what was the Sultan's Ayyūbid dynasty (i.e. pushing the boundaries of the existing international system). This is why the significance and the relevance of encounter for Muslim-Christian relations, interreligious dialogue, and international relations is perhaps greater than it first appears to be the case since it is situated within this more radical holistic and integrative Franciscan model of international relations.

**(2)**

**Historical Reflection, the Limits of Historical Knowing, and the Dialectics of Choice: The Franciscan Question, Critical Theory, and Social Constructivism in International Relations**

Art and culture – in the Middle Ages, in any age, and in our own time, help to construct the social world, and the cultural models of success in which all of us develop our ideas, beliefs, and values (going back to Francis's 'Spoleto moment,' and what this section defines as his – and, our dialectic of choice in the world). They also help to socially construct the social world in which we interpret who are our society's - or our country's, friends, rivals, or enemies in international relations (section 1).[25] Zeffirelli believes his film, *Brother Sun, Sister Moon,* was so harshly rejected by critics because it went against the grain of the new cynicism during the Vietnam War. However, the early part of Zeffirelli's film vividly captures the joy, poverty, idealism, and enthusiasm of the early Franciscan movement, and why it spread so rapidly across Europe.[26]

The film's message and its portrayal of Franciscan values – the ideals of love and gentleness, itself a particular construction of the Franciscan tradition, were easily dismissed as 'idealism,' compared to what really works in foreign affairs - the timeless and universal truths underlying this new

[25] Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil (eds.), *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996). On theorizing the power of art, culture, and religion in relation to peace and conflict see, Roland Bleiker, 'The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory.' *Millennium*, 30, (December 2001): 509-533, Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics*, Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies (Palgrave, 2012).

[26] William J. Short, OFM, *Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition* (Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2009).

cynicism – political realism or power politics, with Nixon's massive 'Christmas bombing' of North Vietnam to force the country to return to the negotiating table. This cynicism is borne out in the positivist, mainstream, social scientific study of international relations.[27] In a similar way, Tolan has argued the portrayal of the encounter between St. Francis and Sultan al-Kamil in different centuries – during the period of European great power politics (and colonialism and imperialism), Francis is portrayed as the representative of the superior, and dominant culture of Europe, or now Francis is portrayed in equality and dialogue with Muslims, and so these portrayals reflect Europe's changing perceptions of Islam and international security.[28]

Therefore, a lot is at stake in how to interpret the past, and how to interpret the present, regarding how this encounter is evaluated, and in determining its contemporary meaning and significance. There is a lot at stake – *theoretically* – what is 'history,' what does it mean for something to be 'historical,' what is the character of historical knowing, and what is science, what does it mean to be scientific or social scientific in conducting research – in history or contemporary international relations? There is a lot is at stake - *practically*, for evaluating international affairs in the past, and in the present – is there a role for values, ethics - love, gentleness, compassion, or is there an inevitable tragedy of power politics, for sadly this is simply the result of the problem of international anarchy in international relations (section 1).[29] What do the answers to these kinds of questions mean for contemporary Muslim-Christian relations, interreligious dialogue, and for international relations?

This section argues it is possible to establish a relationship between the purposes of the Franciscan Question, i.e. its concern with the multiple sources, interests, perspectives, and interpretations of 'events' – like the encounter between St. Francis and Sultan al-Kamil, which are now constructed as the life of the historical Francis, and the purposes of scholars of critical theory and social constructivism who investigate 'events' in the theory of international relations. The basis for the similarity between both these forms of inquiry – the encounter at Damietta, the life of the historical Francis, and *any* event in contemporary international relations, is a recognition we live in a social world as much as a material world. If human beings – in the past, and in the present, live in a social world, then there are a variety of *intersubjective* issues (ideas, values, emotions, norms), which need to be a part of any attempt to explain or understanding events – or, really social actions, in the past, and in contemporary international relations. This turns out to require different theories and methods from those used to explain events in the physical or natural world (sections 3 and 4).

In fact, the argument of this section should not be so strange to medieval historians (nor even to social constructivist scholars of international relations) since some of the leading medieval historians have argued for a similar constructivist position, which is also espoused by many critical

[27] Bruce Kuklick, *Blind Oracles: Intellectuals and War from Kennan to Kissinger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).
[28] John Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[29] John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (Norton & Co., 2001), Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker (eds.), "Theorising emotions in world politics,' Special Issue, *International Theory*, 6, 1 (2014). See also footnote 36.

theorists.[30] Many historians – including medieval historians, now recognize 'history,' and what it means to be 'historical,' is not – in some positivist, objective sense, value-free sense, a tale of 'what really happened' – in the encounter at Damietta, or in *any* event, and argue for a social constructivist position. This shift towards historical constructivism is also reflected since the 1980s among critical and social constructivist scholars who also criticise the positivist analysis of the Vietnam War and the Cold War in the social scientific study of international relations (Introduction and section 1).

In other words, 'what actually happened' as an event in the past, and 'what actually is happening' as an event in contemporary international relations are both social constructions - in which the data and sources are *not* theory-independent because it is the credibility, weight, and reliability of the data, which is precisely at issue. The remedy is not simply accumulating more and more data, sources, or evidence (as if knowledge is cumulative in the study of the social world as it is in the study of the physical or natural world), or a naïve return to the sources (as if they can speak for themselves). The remedy is *criticism* for both the study of events in history and in contemporary international relations (emphasis in the original).[31]

Therefore, this is why the Franciscan Question, with its concern with criticism - the multiple sources, interests, perspectives, and interpretations of the 'events,' which are now constructed as the life of the historical Francis – especially, the encounter with Sultan al-Kamil, is *similar* to the purpose of critical theorists and social constructivists in the theory of international relations, and the way they seek to interpret and understand how *any* event is constructed in contemporary international relations (also given it's multiple sources, interests, perspectives, and interpretations). This is why engaging the scholarly study of this encounter with critical and constructivist approaches to the theory of international relations may point towards a new understanding of the meaning and significance of the encounter between St. Francis and Sultan al-Kamil – beyond moral tales and lessons of history to apply to Muslim-Christian relations and international relations today.

The place to begin is the nature of historical knowing. No matter if the investigation is the historical Jesus, the historical Socrates,[32] or the historical Francis, or the origins of the United Nations (Johnson's example, see below), or the European Union, the confident contrast often made between 'faith' and 'history' assumes a modern confidence in a shared understanding of these concepts which belongs to the twentieth century – the last modern century. This is no longer the case in these times when the postmodern can overlap with the post-secular in our globalizing and pluralist world of multiple modernities (i.e. the multiple ways of being modern and being religious), which characterize the twenty-first century.[33] The 'historical' cannot be contrasted with the 'mythical,' as if the first concept applies to 'what really happened,' and the second to 'something that is made up,' nor is the

---

[30] Hall and Kratochwil cite the medieval historians in the *Annales* school of French historiography, Georges Duby, Jacques Le Goff, and the Canadian-American historian Norman Cantor. Duby explicitly denies history can be a science, and rejects logical positivism as a viable epistemology for the study of history. Rodney Bruce Hall and Friedrich V. Kratochwil, "Medieval tales: neorealist 'science' and the abuse of history,' *International Organization*, 47, 3 (1993): 479-491.

[31] Rodney Bruce Hall and Friedrich V. Kratochwil, "Medieval tales: neorealist 'science' and the abuse of history,' *International Organization*, 47, 3 (1993): 479-491.

[32] Johnson, pp. 105-109,141.

[33] S.N Eisenstadt, 'The Reconstruction of Religious Arenas in the Framework of Multiple Modernities,' *Millennium: journal of international studies* (London School of Economics), 29, 3 (2000): 591-611.

'historical' the same as what is 'true,' 'real,' or 'factual,' in contrast to what is false, fictional, or 'non-historical.'[34]

'History' or what it means to be 'historical' is not synonymous with 'the past' or with 'what really happened in the past' – at Damietta, in the encounter, or in any event, anywhere else, nor is it a collection of uplifting 'moral tales,' 'lessons of history,' or a testing ground for theories of international conflict or cooperation in international relations (e.g. Huntington's thesis on the 'clash of civilizations'). The reason – shared by many constructivist historians, and especially constructivist medieval historians, and critical and constructivist scholars of international relations, is that history is a social construction, it is 'a product of memory' (Kratochwil), 'a product of human intelligence and imagination (Johnson).[35] 'In its essence, history is a mode of human knowing. 'It is an *interpretive* activity' because it deals with events, activities, experiences – some recorded, and some not, and the effort of the historian is to interpret or make sense of these activities and experiences.[36] This means history – and, so the investigation of this encounter, is 'deeply involved in the way societies and individuals construct their *identity*,[37] and this means memory is deeply involved in our *contemporary* constructions of identity, meaning, agency, and the political projects we try to pursue in politics and international relations. Memory – or its absence (such as paucity of Arab accounts of the encounter?), 'is part of the ways in which 'human beings begin to negotiate their *present* experience and understanding with reference to group and individual memory.'[38]

This can clearly be seen in the way medieval historians have 'invented the Middle Ages' (Cantor),[39] and in the way *contemporary* international events – and, *not* only the global Islamic resurgence, but also the Cold War, the nuclear age, deterrence theory, and the rise of 'protection wars,' or 'wars of humanitarian intervention' have influenced modern crusade historiography.[40] This kind of negotiation – is similar to Croce dictum, all history has the sense of contemporary history, since the way the past is recounted, refers to *present* needs, and *present* situations.[41] This is certainly an apt description of the current interest in St. Francis's encounter with the Sultan because of the

---

[34] Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels*, p. 81.
[35] Johnson, pp. 81,82
[36] Johnson, p. 82.
[37] It is the case that al-Kamil is negatively remembered in Arab sources as the one who gave away Jerusalem, but can this encounter 're-collect' again (Kratochwil), tell new stories, narratives which in the future could become part of new collective remembrance. This speaks to what Kratochwil has called the malleability of the past as it is created by memory through recording (or not created in Arab sources as the case may be). He points out, 'here emotions play a particular role in 'selecting' and making important the thing one 'records' is shown by the etymology of the word. Not simply the storage of data is involved but something is entrusted to the 'heart' (cur!) for keeping' Friedrich Kratochwil, "History, Action and Identity: Revisiting the 'Second' Great Debate and Assessing its Importance for Social Theory,' *European Journal of International Relations*, 12, 1 (2006): 5-29, esp. pp. 17, 25. See also footnote 29.
[38] Johnson, pp. 81-82.
[39] Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Quill/William Morrow, 1991).
[40] Jonathan Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades*, xi-xiii, 1-2; Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), Preface to the Third Edition, xviii-xix; Cantor*, Inventing the Middle Ages*, Chapter 7 (Cold War Liberalism and the Medieval State), 245-286.
[41] Benedetto Croce, *History as the Story of Liberty* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1941).

global Islamic resurgence, but this needs to be seen in the context of ways crusade historiography more broadly has been influenced by events in international relations.

There are evident intrinsic limits on historical knowing as a form of knowing which are relevant to evaluating the encounter between St. Francis and Sultan al-Kamil – and, in evaluating *any* event in diplomatic history or in contemporary international relations. The first is that 'a great deal of what human beings consider 'real' escapes historical knowledge. This is party the point at which this article began, with the encounter between St. Francis and the Sultan: was it an 'event' or not, and for *whom* it was an event, and why was it an event for them, and not for others (i.e. for the Arabs Francis was just another Christian preacher, although probably scruffier and more ragged). Events are socially, and politically constructed, but these 'events' can still 'miss a great deal, or even miss real events.'[42] It also 'misses a great deal of what is most properly human,' and Johnson lists 'things like alienation and forgiveness, compassion and despair, meaning, value, love, and hope' (i.e. also the values and emotions ridiculed by Zeffirelli's critics?). This limitation on historical knowing perhaps reflects Franciscan concerns, and the radical Franciscan social epistemology developed in section 3.[43] 'Only with considerable stretching can these 'realities' be called 'historical,' and yet 'they are real,' 'they are not necessarily "events,"' in the sense that 'they do not necessarily surface for our inspection, they may not enter collective memory. Never the less, they are often the most defining elements of our humanity. But they are not the stuff of history' (or at least until the rise of social history?),[44] nor are they usually the stuff of the mainstream, social scientific study of international relations (which missed both the power of Vietnamese nationalism and Shi'ite Islam in Iran, nor should we forget the way the British missed Gandhi's soft power in his passive resistance campaign for India's independence, which also influenced the ANC in South Africa, and Martin Luther King in the United States). 'Historical knowing is like a sieve that catches big chunks but let's much finer stuff slip through.'[45]

Moreover, this argument regarding what is 'real' also applies to the study of religion and spirituality – beliefs, motives, and social practices, and their inclusion or exclusion from the study of history, diplomatic history, or international relations (this is what makes the rise of the pluralist school of crusades interpretation so interesting in relation to the religious turn in the study of international relations). The 'roots and soil of a society are the level at which religion works,' Martin Wight has argued, in ways similar to Johnson, 'and what the historian studies,' and, arguably, until the rise of the religious turn, what was studied by most international relations scholars, 'is a very small part of the total picture.' What scholars should remember is 'the creative activity of religion is most powerful where it is *least* recorded and most *difficult* to observe – in the minds of the masses and in the traditions of the common people (this points to the problem with positivism, empiricism, and sense observation as the only warranted form of knowledge creation in the social sciences).[46] This point is

[42]Johnson, 82.
[43] Johnson 82.
[44] Johnson, p. 82 also points towards the study of emotions in international relations (footnote 21).
[45] Johnson, p. 82
[46] Martin Wight, 'The Gifford Lectures,' *The Dublin Review*, second quarter (1950): 108-110.This is a quote from Dawson in Wight's review of Christopher Dawson's Gifford Lectures, *Religion and Culture*, delivered at the University of Edinburgh in 1947 (London: Sheed & Ward, 1948), and *Religion and the*

relevant to the ontology of the Middle Ages – for *whose* Middle Ages are scholars inventing or constructing – the Middle Ages of kings, knights, Ladies, bishops, and troubadours, or the Middle Ages of those on the periphery – the serfs, farmers, the poor – and, *where* does St. Francis and his Franciscan brothers – and, Clare and her sisters, fit in these medieval constructions? (section 4 on developing a radical Franciscan social ontology elaborates on this point).

What are 'events' in historical knowledge – this again goes back to the beginning of this article and points to how 'slippery' (Johnson) the concept of an event is – quite beyond something as minor as this encounter. The popularity of St. Francis, his 'presence in Damietta, and his daring yet futile attempt at converting Sultan al-Kamil is 'the most explored topic in the historiography' of the Fifth Crusade. It has generated a vast corpus of scholarship, which is also fascinated with this 'direct religious confrontation,' even thought it was a 'rather minor moment in the course of the campaign' (here the encounter is even downgraded from being an event to a moment).[47] So, 'What constitutes a "human event?"'[48] Johnson asks, even though he is mainly concerned with the debate over constructions of the historical Jesus, 'We may speak of the "birth of the United Nations"' which is inarguably a 'historical event,' but 'what constituted it *as* an event? Who participated? When did it start?' He argues – as a constructivist historical theologian, in the same way as critical scholars and constructivists scholars of international relations – in answering *any* of these kinds of questions, and many others regarding the actors and their power, interests, purposes, and perspectives involves editorial selection, and so 'we are already engaging in interpretation' (some scholars of international relations talk about having 'pre-theories' which they bring to their investigations). 'Our selection and naming of something' – religious, secular, political, or economic, 'as an event is itself *constitutive* of the "event"' (emphasis added, and this is a point to return to in section 3 regarding Jacques de Vitry's accounts of St. Francis's encounter with Sultan al-Kamil).[49]

The same ambiguity faces the second component of historical knowing - the records of human events – not only can they be minimal, and but these are inevitably selective – and, in Franciscan Studies it is well known, it can be quite deliberately selective (Bonaventure's limiting of the previous stories of St. Francis circulating during his time). The minimal records of the encounter between St. Francis and the Sultan al-Kamil mentioned at the beginning of this article vividly demonstrates this more general point. 'Not everything that happens is recorded, nor is everything that is recorded is preserved. Not everything preserved is edited, translated, read, or understood.'[50] Indeed, one of Paul Sabatier's main contributions to the Franciscan Question, now a corner stone of Franciscan Studies, is the proposition that Francis's own writings, and what they reveal regarding his

---

*Rise of Western Culture* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1950). At this time, with Dawson as editor, *The Dublin Review*, was arguably one of the most influential Catholic magazines in the English-speaking world. Martin Wight, in the Department of International Relations, London School of Economics, was a friend of Dawson's, and was one of the founders of the English School of international relations in the 1950s.

[47] Jan Vandeburie, 'The historiography of the Fifth Crusade,' in *The Fifth Crusade in Context*, 5-12, esp. 7. In fact, Jonathan Riley-Smith, in *The Crusades: A History*, even omits mentioning the encounter in his account of the Fifth Crusade.
[48] Johnson, p. 82.
[49] Johnson, p. 82-83.
[50] Johnson, p. 83.

theology and spirituality is the proper *interpretive principle*, which should be used to evaluate and interpret *any* other documents, regarding his views, on war, peace, the economy, and any *events* – like the encounter with the Sultan.[51]

The final component of historical knowing is the one which most closely resembles the study of events in international relations. This is because it is the most explicitly interpretive, and seeks to take 'the evidence of past human events and connect them in some *meaningful* pattern' (emphasis added). Any scholar's interpretive knowing is inevitably influenced by the world around them, by events in international relations. Records of human events are also selective, and represent certain perspectives and interpretations, and even historical data, such as inscriptions, inevitably result in interpretations of participants, or observers of events.[52] This is also why Kratochwil argues historical 'facts' are always a part of a story, a narrative; history is not simply 'there' (like a collection of facts or things to be mined to create new theories), but is a product memory, a product of 'recollection.'[53]

So, what is to be done? The character and limits of historical knowing, and a constructivist understanding of the social world - in history, including medieval history, and in contemporary international relations, point towards what Kratochwil has called the need for *historical reflection*. Historical reflection recognizes knowledge of the past *does* relate to our practical choices in *contemporary* politics and international relations – and, so the importance of historical reflection for the study of the encounter. However, the importance of any historical construction of the encounter does not lay it 'really being' a store house of fixed data for (reliable) moral tales, or lessons of the past (e.g. Francis as peacemaker, as forerunner of interreligious dialogue, etc.), or even for social scientists a testing ground for their newest theories of international conflict (e.g. Huntington's 'clash of civilizations') or theories of international cooperation (e.g. medieval concepts of peace, diplomacy, and peacemaking).

Rather, historical reflection helps us to become aware of the *dialectic of choice* we are always faced with – as Francis, his brothers (and Clare and her sisters), and al-Kamil, and their contemporaries, also were faced with a dialectic of choice in their time (and given ISIS and radical Islamism, some surprising choices).[54] It is from 'the present that the past is *always* recollected, and can be joined to the future by a "political project,"' and 'precisely because we *know* things could have been different, the more we deepen our understanding of the past, we begin to sense the decision points, the dialectics of choice – the complexity of ideas, values, emotions, politics, and economics

---

[51] Jacques Dalrun, *The Misadventure of Francis of Assisi* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2002), p. 30; Michael J.P. Robson, 'The writings of Francis,' in Michael J.P. Robson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 34-49; Thaddée Matura, OFM, *Francis of Assisi: The Message in His Writings* (Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2004).

[52] Johnson, p. 83

[53] Kratochwil, "History, Action and Identity," pp. 5-29, esp., 7-8

[54] Intriguingly, given the contemporary problems of religious freedom, and the freedom of conversion in the Muslim world, K.S. Parker argues Sultan al-Kamil, 'was himself, as a rule, quite tolerant and sympathetic to his Christian subjects, albeit pragmatic.' He says numerous examples of this are found in the *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria* (around 100 AD, and after), such as his generosity towards a Coptic convert to Islam, and then permitting his reversion to Christianity, his affection for (Christian) desert hermits near Alexandria, and his sojourn among the Coptic monks nearby in the oasis Wādia Nātrun K.S. Parker, 'Christians of the Ayyūbid Sultanate,' in *The Fifth Crusade in Context*, 135-145, esp.139-140.

surrounding the choices made, and what were their consequences, and so we can see the opportunities forgone, which might have sent the narrative, the outcomes, in *another* direction, and so we can become more aware of our *own* potential as agents in today's world to help make a better future for all of us.[55] This does not mean, of course, 'everything is now possible only because "the more constraining 'structures' are now 'deconstructed' in this reflective process." We come to better understand – as the sections 3 and 4 in this article can only begin to show, how certain medieval concepts, social practices were socially, politically, and religiously – and, even economically *constructed* in this reflective process – and how St. Francis performed the gospel life in ways which *transformed* their use and meaning – ultimately ending feudalism, the crusades, and changing medieval society.

On the contrary, we also come to know through historical reflection, the *constraints of history*, this does not need to mean high ideals are abandoned, only the idealist fantasies, the foolish expectations that things will change simply because we now know that the "'necessities' to be confronted" are not the "natural condition" of society or human beings, but are only human products, constructions, and so they can be changed (e.g. slavery, patriarchy, etc.). However, this kind of historical reflection, "is nevertheless, the precondition for a proper appreciation of action and agency" – regarding this encounter in the thirteenth century, and our own action and agency facing the global problems of the twenty-first century.[56]

**(3)**

**Towards a Radical 'Franciscan' Social Epistemology for Global Politics**

This section challenges the foundations of the conception that the world - the historical social world in the thirteenth century, or the social world of contemporary international relations, is simply 'out there' in some objective sense, and so what the encounter offers for the present – is limited, and even reduced, to ethics - moral tales, or lessons of the past for contemporary Muslim-Christian relations, interreligious dialogue, and international relations.

The place to begin is recognize that positivist epistemology, the positivist, mainstream, approach to epistemology – the critical analysis of cognition (Johnson), or constructing knowledge in the humanities – in history, and in social sciences is adopted from the model of the physical and natural sciences. It is based on three propositions which set out the (alleged) belief in the 'objectivity' of the 'scientific approach,' as it is often propagated in mainstream study of the humanities – including history, and study of social science, including international relations: firstly, positivism as a type of philosophy of science founded on an empiricist epistemology or theory of knowledge (i.e. it holds that warranted or legitimate knowledge is only grounded in sensory experience or empirical observation);

[55] Kratochwil, "History, Action, and Identity,' pp. 5-29, esp. 7-8. See the journal *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* (Brill, Leiden) as way to counter the easy comparison between the crusades and Huntington's concept of the 'clash of civilizations.'

[56] Friedrich Kratochwil, 'History, Action and Identity,' 7-8. Martin Wight also argues, given Kratochwil's analysis of the dialectics of choice, "The danger in ransacking the past for a clearer understanding of contemporary conflicts is to forget that the past in its richness and indeterminacy, contains in equal measure clues to the conflicts that have *not* arisen and the *rapprochements* that will yet succeed." Wight, review of Adda B. Bozeman, *Politics and Culture in International History* (Oxford University Press, 1961), *International Affairs*, 38, 2 (1962): 228-229.

secondly, naturalism (i.e. the idea of epistemological monism or the uniformity of science, and so what it means to be 'scientific,' and the criteria for this is field-independent, it does not matter if research is conducted in physical science, natural science, the humanities, or the social sciences). This is the basis of the idea origins of the idea the *same* theories (and sometimes methods) to investigate the physical or natural sciences can be applied to the study of social action by human beings (i.e. the methods are the same for explaining a volcanic eruption like Mount Vesuvius, or a political eruption like a revolution the overthrow of Marcos in the Philippines), rather than using a more holistic conception of causation (going back to Aristotle);[57] and, thirdly, it is based on the fact-value dichotomy, i.e. the distinctions already mentioned between 'faith' and 'history,' or a belief, really even a *faith* that 'facts,' objects, things, or factual statements, even in the social world, can be easily distinguished from 'values' - ethics, morals, ethical principles, and ethical social practices.[58]

The concept of social epistemology in critical theory and social constructivism is part of the challenge to scientific (positivist) approach to the study of history that has distorted the quests for the historical Jesus, historical Socrates, and historical Francis of Assisi.[59] It is also a challenge to mainstream, 'problem-solving' theory in international relations. It poses a challenge to both – in the present, in understanding or interpreting social action, Muslim-Christian relations, or any event in contemporary international relations; and, in the past, in understanding or interpreting social action in the Middle Ages, the crusades, and this encounter. The reason is that these scholars – critical theorists, social constructivists are indebted to the "linguistic turn" in philosophy (since Wittgenstein), and interrogate the connection between facts and values, words and things, and symbols and what they symbolize in international relations. They argue the "truth" about the social world cannot be gained through an (alleged) "correspondence" between our theories, concepts, and some (objective) conception of events in the world (i.e. the correspondence theory of truth). The main reason is that language is bound up with what "constitutes" the world, how people see, and interpret the world,

---

[57] On beginning to make a link between Aristotle's holistic conception of causality in the Franciscan intellectual tradition, and in the theory of international relations see Milja Kurki, "Causes of a Divided Discipline: rethinking the concept of cause in International Relations Theory," *Review of International Studies*, 32, 2 (2006): 189-216, and Kenan B. Osborne, OFM, *The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition*, vol. 1 (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2003).

[58] Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, pp. 81-86; Ken Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005); Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Scott M. Thomas, "Living Critically and 'Living Faithfully' in a Global Age: Justice, Emancipation, and the Political Theology of International Relations," *Millennium*, 39, 2 (2010): 505-524.

[59] It was Ernest Renan, whose *Life of Jesus* (1863) helped start the quest for the historical Jesus in the nineteenth century, who encouraged Paul Sabatier to take up the quest for the historical Francis. He developed many key insights (and many unhelpful ones), and he began an i*nterpretive* problem, which Vauchez argues continues down to our own day. A 'whole historiography of Protestant or liberal inspiration presented Francis as a precursor of the Reformation.' Zeffirelli, it turns out, from an artistic perspective, was faced with the same problem. He rejected over 20 scripts for *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*. 'The problem was they kept seeing Francis in Protestant terms, a pre-Lutheran revolutionary overthrowing the authority of the pope, whereas the opposite was the case.' André Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi: the life and afterlife of a medieval saint* (Yale University Press, 212, English edition), 234-238; Zeffirelli, p. 253; Johnson, p. 139.

rather than merely being a *reflection* of it.[60] Most critical theorists, constructivists, do *not* doubt the world exists, nor do they doubt it exists "independent" of our minds, but they *do* doubt we can get behind the ideas, words, concepts, or even doctrines (i.e. language) of *statements* about the world in order to compare them to see if they "correspond" to an objective conception of the world.[61] Our theories, concepts - beliefs, values, passions, and interests, "constitute" the world, construct what the social world is like, so "in the social sciences some of the most important concepts are *constitutive* (and are used recursively) of the social world rather than simply mirroring or describing it" like in the correspondence theory of truth (recall Johnson argued in section 2 that labelling an activity, a social action as an 'event' is constitutive of the event).[62]

Therefore, what does the concept of social epistemology mean - for St. Francis what constituted "the world" - really, his "social world?" It was constructed by the ideas, concepts, social practices, he and his contemporaries used every day – war, crusades, martyrdom, pilgrimage, missions, indulgences, holy places, and Muslims as fanatics, demons, heretics, or idolaters. We also construct *our* world in the same way, with the concepts, and social practices we use every day - the state, sovereignty, (hordes or swarms of) refugees, migrants, 'religious terrorism' (as something more dangerous than 'secular terrorism'), or radical Islamism, and Muslims as "moderates" or as "radicals" or "extremists," and a "clash of civilizations" (or a dialogue between civilizations). This is why "events" do not simply exist – in the past, during the Middle Ages, the crusades as simply a clash between Christendom and the Islamic world, nor do they simply exist in the present - in contemporary international affairs. 'Theory,' Michael Cox, a famous critical theorist, has argued, 'is *always* for someone or for some purpose' (this is true of all interests, sources, and perspectives).[63] Some things that happen – in history, or in the present, are chosen as 'facts,' and are arranged according to some interest, purpose, and perspective to tell a story, a narrative – the gospels, the historical Jesus, the historical Francis, the founding of the United Nations, the founding of the European Union, the way democracy brings peace (democratic peace theory, which underlies U.S. democracy promotion since the Clinton administration), or the story of a global Islamic threat.

This is clearly indicated by the multiple accounts of the actors, interests, perspectives and interpretations of the Fifth Crusade, and the minor event, the meeting between St. Francis and Sultan al-Kamil. It is possible to see this minor event, or episode within a framework of bureaucratic politics of foreign policy decision-making common to diplomatic historians and scholars of international relations (another article may try to integrate the literature on the Fifth Crusade and with the literature on bureaucratic politics and foreign policy analysis). The sources still seem to be rather one-sided (on the Christian side), but the coverage seems to be getting better regarding Sultan al-Kamil, his peace offer, and pressures surrounding his foreign policy decision-making.

---

[60] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1984); Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 86-91.
[61] Friedrich Kratochwil, "Constructing a New Orthodoxy? Wendt's 'Social Theory of International Relations' and the Constructivist Challenge" *Millennium* 29, 1 (2000): 73-101.
[62] Kratochwil, "History, Action, and Identity," pp. 7-8.
[63] Robert W. Cox, 'Social forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,' *Millennium* 10, 2 (1981): 126-155.

However, the encounter points to the limits of historical knowing examined by Johnson and Kratochwil and the importance of historical reflection. It has been argued that perhaps the earliest account of the encounter – the closest we have to an eye-witness account, is probably by Jacques de Vitry, the bishop of Acre, who was in the crusader camp when Francis arrived (1219), and as it was already argued was familiar as early as 1216 in Italy with Francis and the new Franciscan movement. The first account, written in a letter to the West, when the crusaders *expected* victory (early 1220), it depicts the encounter as a minor "event," and focuses on the popularity of the Friars Minor, whose imitation of the apostolic life, and the primitive Church was attracting many young men, some of whom were rather inexperienced – and, like the gospel imperative, went around the world in pairs spreading the gospel. However, his second account, part of the *Historia Occidentalis*, written after the crusaders' *defeat* (c. 1221-1225), now constructs the encounter as a "major event" to show St. Francis as a model of Church renewal.[64] In our time, with the rise of Islam, St. Francis is now constructed as a peacemaker, or precursor of interreligious dialogue, and Muslim-Christian relations (e.g. the 'spirit of Assisi' meetings started by John-Paul II, which the papacy continues to this day).

Similarly, is the interpretation of the gifts the Sultan offered Francis (an objective, observable, or empirical event in many of the primary sources) – were they a genuine demonstration of "hospitality," as a type of Arab *social practice*, rooted in the Islamic *tradition* (e.g. an Islamic version of MacIntyre's virtue-ethics tradition), and indicative of what we now know regarding the benevolent nature of Sultan al-Kamil, or did these gifts show the devious Sultan trying to undermine the Franciscan practices of poverty and simplicity (the view of St. Bonaventure and some other Franciscan writers)? In other words, relying only on empiricism, empirical observation, a mainstream, problem-solving approach to theory cannot adequately explain this event or answer these kinds of questions regarding social action. In order to answer this question, the social action has to be holistically *interpreted* in view of a variety of other factors. In fact, the different accounts reflect various interests within the Franciscan order at that time (e.g. Joachim de Fiori's apocalyptic prophesies, which so influenced earlier Franciscans which later coalesced into the Franciscan Spiritualists), and within the Church (Bonaventure's concerns with heresy, disorder, etc. as minister-general of the order).

The concept of a conversionary epistemology – as a type social epistemology perhaps best describes a perhaps distinctively "Franciscan" way of seeking the world, constructing knowledge of it, and interpreting the world - encounter, conversion, knowledge, and transformation. This set of concepts is rooted in insights, which are fearful, painful, gained from Francis's own dramatic *encounters* – Assisi's war against Perugia, and being a prisoner of war, with the leper, with the poor – and, ultimately with the Sultan, ostensibly the enemy of Christendom. Francis, over many years, constructed knowledge of the world as a result of his encounters, even *riskier* encounters, *deeper* conversions, as he identified with the leper, the poor, the lowly, in Assisi, Umbria, and other parts of Italy; and, through them, made the discovery – deeper, more challenging, *knowledge* about how the

[64] Writings of Jacques de Vitry, Letter VI (1220), *Historia Occidentalis* (c. 1221-1225) in FA ED I, pp. 580-585.

world really works comes from “the Other” – those on the margins, the periphery, and not the top of society.

In other words, this led to even *deeper* transformations in how he engaged with the world around him – firstly, seeking peace with God, peace with or within himself, so he could become a person of peace with *everyone* – regardless of social class or station, and this is what led him to seek peace *within* the factional violence of communes, the city-states now emerging as the main form of political community, and seeking peace *between* the city-states in emerging city-state type of international system, and eventually seeking peace *beyond* Italy, and into the rest of Europe, and to the Holy Land, meeting the Sultan, ostensibly the enemy of Christendom, in the Holy Land, what is now called the Middle East. Crucially, Franciscan Studies now emphasizes Francis’s many *conversions* (plural), his increasingly deeper conversions, rather than a single event (the miracle of the San Damiano cross, section 1), a continual process, which can be described by this concept of social epistemology, or conversionary epistemology.[65]

Perhaps, Rowan Williams’s evocative phrase “the wound of knowledge” expresses these relationships - how fear, pain, suffering, rejection, and humiliation are all parts of genuine encounter and conversion.[66] Any such encounters lead to what can only be called a kind of “conversion” for what is radically rejected is the separation of facts and values, the observer and the observed (positivism, naturalism, and the fact-value dichotomy), “all the way down,”[67] i.e. down to a person’s identity and very inner being - as a knight or merchant (Francis) or as a noble (Clare).

This kind of knowledge is gained *initially* by *encounters*, like those Francis and (perhaps, Sultan al-Kamil experienced during their encounters?), that lead to “falling upward,” i.e. only those who have “gone down,” and experience – in some way, at some time – fear, pain, suffering, rejection, failure, and humiliation (e.g. Francis’s time as a prisoner of war, his return to Assisi after the dream of Spoleto), can “come up” again, and be open to new knowledge, understandings, and broader horizons.[68] This leads to the discovery – more deeply, challengingly, *knowledge* about how the world really works comes from ‘the Other,’ those on the margins, the periphery, and not the top of society.

Therefore, is possible to examine Francis’s religious conversion, his encounter with the lepers, the poor, and his even riskier, eventual encounter with Sultan al-Malik - as indicative of *a radical sociology of knowledge*.[69] Recent studies of spirituality and history, and religious conversion

---

[65] Pierre Brunette, OFM, *Francis and His Conversions* (Quincy, Il: Franciscan Press, 1997); Daniel Horan, OFM, “’Those Going Among the Saracens and Other Nonbelievers’: Thomas Merton and Franciscan Interreligious Dialogue,” *Merton Annual*, 21, 1 (2008): 1202-1204; Daniel Horan, OFM. 2014. *The Franciscan Heart of Thomas Merton: A New Look at the Spiritual Inspiration of His Life, Thought, and Writing*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2014).

[66] Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross* (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1979).

[67] Chris Brown, 'Turtles All the Way Down': Anti-Foundationalism, Critical Theory and International Relations,’ *Millennium*, 23, 2 (1994): 213-236.

[68] Richard Rohr, OFM *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2011); Paul Rout, OFM, ‘St Francis of Assisi and Islam: A Theological Perspective on a Christian-Muslim Encounter, *Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean*, 23, 3 (2011): 205-215.

[69] Michael H. Crosby, OFM, Cap., *Finding Francis, Following Christ* (New York: Orbis, 2008).

reinforce this interpretation.[70] Perhaps, not so surprisingly, Pope Francis has helped the Catholic Church to recover this perspective as a trajectory towards the periphery (also the reason for Johnson's quotation at the beginning of the article). The title of the first collection of his homilies at Santa Marta, "truth is an encounter," recognizes St. Francis's key insights on encounter, conversion, knowledge, and transformation.[71] Moreover, this is also a recovery of a central message of the Second Vatican Council.[72] The idea knowledge comes from the margins is also increasing recognized in the theory of international relations.[73]

**(4)**

**Towards a Radical "Franciscan" Social Ontology of Global Politics:**

Ontology is the branch of metaphysics that examines the nature of being and existence. In the study of international relations, it examines what kinds of actors, objects, agents, or categories that exist, or are said to exist, and the relationships between them. The title of Zeffirelli's film, *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, of course, is taken from St. Francis's famous "Canticle of the Creatures." It is not only charming poetry, but also a profound statement of Franciscan metaphysics, a radical Franciscan social ontology – the fundamental relatedness of all creatures and all creation. For Francis, and his brothers, God is both Creator and Father, and so all people, all creatures, and creation are ontological siblings. This is the core reality of the world, the deep ontological principle underlying it. This radical Franciscan social ontology – although expressed poetically, powerfully underlies Francis's *cultural* critique of Christendom, and it also provides a key interpretive principle - for evaluating his views on war, peace, poverty, Muslim-Christian relations, and international relations. Zeffirelli's film was scoffed at by many critics, but we are now discovering its vision of a radical Franciscan social ontology is being verified with the rise of the Anthropocene Age, i.e. the way for the first time in history human beings are influencing the processes of the physical and natural world as a key characteristic of the globalizing and pluralistic world of the twenty-first century.[74]

---

[70] Chandra S. Mallampalli, 'Protest and Conversion: Is conversion more about this world than the next?' *Books & Culture* (May/June 2000): 23-25; Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton University Press, 1998).

[71] Jorge Mario Bergoglio/Papa Francesco, *La verità è un incontro. Omelie da Santa Marta* (Rizzoli, 2014); Pasquale Ferrara, The Concept of Periphery in Pope Francis' Discourse: A Religious Alternative to Globalization?', 6, *Religions* (2015): 42-57. Pope Francis, who made a papal pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 2014, has identified the Holy Land as both centre and periphery. For the wider Christian context in the Middle East see Anthony O'Mahony, "Christianity in the wider Levant Region: modern History and contemporary Context," in Kail Ellis, OSA (ed.) *Secular Nationalism and Citizenship in Muslim Countries: Arab Christians in the Levant* (London Palgrave, 2018), pp. 61-88.

[72] Massimo Faggioli, "Vatican II and the Church of the Margins" *Theological Studies*, 74, 1 (2013): 808-818.

[73] Cynthia Enloe, "Margins, silences and bottom rungs: how to overcome the underestimation of power in the study of international relations," in Steve Smith, Ken Booth, Marysia Zalewski (eds.), *International theory: positivism & beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 186-202; David L. Blainey and Naeem Inayatullah, "International Relations from Below," in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 663-674.

[74] Sherrie M. Steiner, *Moral Pressure for Responsible Globalization: Religious Diplomacy in the Age of the Anthropocene* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

The concept of social ontology – rather than individualist ontology, and social constructivism may also provide an important perspective for a better understanding the medieval social world in the thirteenth century. It tries to answer for the medieval world of the thirteenth century the same kinds of questions post-positivist scholars direct towards understanding the contemporary social world of international relations. Section 3 pointed out the concept of a social epistemology – the discovery that knowledge comes from the margins, the periphery, and this helps clarify why the new optic or viewpoint of social ontology is relevant for studying the past - examining the medieval social world, and for the present: for at all times, a key question of international theory is - what kinds of *actors*, doing which *activities*, are socially and politically *constructed,* and by *whom*, and in whose *interests* - to be a part or to be excluded from domestic politics or international affairs?

The new social movements of religious reform – especially the apostolic life movement, although dating back to the eleventh century, was the return to the pattern of life of Jesus and the early apostles as portrayed in the gospels (i.e. the 'real Jesus' to use Johnson's phrase), which was part of the renewal of the laity (and reform minded clergy) who sensed Christianity was drifting away from an authentic Christian life, what it meant to live faithfully in the world, and had a major impact on how Francis interpreted the gospel life (i.e. its meaning for faith and lifestyle) informed how he perhaps uniquely combined the various elements of apostolic life movement.[75] This movement was still in the thirteenth century a key part of renewal among the laity engaged with the poverty and peace movements, which also offered a prophetic witness and criticism of the crusades (going back to Johnson's quotation at the beginning of the article).[76] This was part of a general criticism of the way the new urban money economy in the cities was linked to the violence and oppression of the feudal classes.[77] The profit economy was simply seen as a new form of exploitation – St. Francis was

---

[75] This is the link between a radical 'Franciscan' social ontology, and critical theory's conception of theory as every-day social practice in international relations (section 1). Prospero Rivi, 'Francis of Assisi and the Laity of his time,' Supplement, *Greyfriars Review*, 15 (2001); Octavian Schmucki, "The 'Way of Life According to the Gospel' as It Was Discovered by St Francis of Assisi," *Greyfriars Review*, 2, 3 (1988): 1-56; C.H. Lawrence, *The Friars: The Impact of the Early Mendicant Movement on Western Society* (London: Longman, 1994).

[76] It has been argued that in the early thirteenth century 'peaceful preaching' the gospel, and Christian conversion in Muslim lands (rather than military or violent crusades and conversion by force) 'resonated' with the 'evangelical awakening,' and the rise of the apostolic life movements. Therefore, St. Francis's missionary activity should be interpreted 'within the milieu' of this evangelical awakening since the late twelfth century. Francis himself (and how he is represented by some of his early biographers), represented a non-violent 'alternative to crusading,' i.e. a 'anti-militaristic, penitential, and missionary approach' towards crusader objectives – the recovery of the Christian holy places, and the conversion of Muslims (Bombi). This was also 'in defiance of the papal crusading propaganda' (Bombi) represented in this article by the preaching of Jacques de Vitry, and Francis's "Dream of Spoleto" (section 1). However, those who have argued St. Francis *cannot* be seen as a representative of the 'anti-crusade movement' because he shared the same objectives of the crusaders – i.e. the recovery of the holy places, and they consider 'the conversion Muslims' to be the same as 'the submission of Muslims' but by non-violent means, ignore the debate over the meaning of 'conversion' as a contested concept' (section 3), miss the importance of the apostolic life movement, the 'Franciscan model,' and the transformation rather than the rejection of medieval social practices set out in this article, and my others on the encounter between St. Francis and Sultan al-Kamil. See Barbara Bombi, 'The Fifth Crusade and the conversion of Muslims,' pp. 68-89.

[77] e.g. the Humiliati, the Poor Lombards, the Poor Catholics, the Reconciled Poor, the Waldes of Lyons, and the Great Devotion or the Great Hallelujah. C.H. Lawrence, *The Friars: The Impact of the Early Mendicant Movement* (London: Longman, 1994); Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the*

*fanatically* opposed to money.[78] On this reading, Francis fits into *whose* history of the Middle Ages - the vivid history of popes, kings, ladies, knights, crusaders, and troubadours; or does he fit into the history of those on the margins, the periphery - lepers, the poor, the peasants, the workers, the monks, the friars, hermits, third orders, and lay confraternities?[79] St. Francis, and the early Franciscan movement represented – and, came to be the best known representative, of these new types of religious renewal and social movements.

The concept of social ontology helps us to better understand Francis's social agency, the way he performed the gospel life challenged some of Christendom's main religious social and cultural practices. In the Middle Ages – as in any age, ideas, concepts, theologies, and social practices do not simply mirror the social world (the correspondence theory of truth), but are socially and politically constructed. They *make social reality what it is*. This means that martyrdom, crusades, and missions, from a constructivist viewpoint, did not simply exist, they *constituted* relations with the Islamic world in one way, through ideas, theologies, and social practices - chivalry, courtesy, courtly love, indulgences, religious vows, rites of penance, and *not* in some other way.[80] Francis, by the way he performed the gospel, rather than *reject* some of these medieval social practices, he *transformed* their use, meaning, and significance: he served not an earthly king, but the 'Most-High King' ('the Dream of Spoleto'), and he extended 'courtesy' (literally courtly behaviour for nobility) to *every* leper, beggar who crossed his path. Regarding chivalry, the crusades, he compared his band of brothers to the Knights of the Round Table, and their itinerant preaching to their quests for adventure.[81] He transformed (violent) crusading, to (non-violent) peaceful conversion – part of the existing criticism of social violence by the poverty and peace movements. This was the reason for going unarmed, without any crusader protection, to visit the Sultan. In his mind he remained a 'crusader,' but he had transformed its meaning, for 'surely a crusader against the standard type familiar in the world of Francis.'[82] However, perhaps even a child or anyone who is willing to see, and to listen (Matt. 11:17, Mark 4:9, 23) may be able to understand this transformation rather than rejection of medieval social practices, and do not need it to be explained to them by a theologian or scholar of international relations.[83]

---

*Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (London: Paul Elk, 1978); Gary Dickson, 'Medieval Revivalism,' in Daniel E. Bornstein, *Medieval Christianity, People's History of Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg/Fortress Press, 2010), 147-178.

[78] Giacomo Todeschini, *Franciscan Wealth: From Voluntary Poverty to Market Society* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2009).

[79] Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages* (New York: Quill/William Morrow, 1991); Jacques Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi* (French, 1999; London: Routledge: 2004).

[80] Rodney Bruce Hall and Friedrich Kratochwil, 'Medieval Tales: neoorealist "science" and the abuse of history,' 479-491; Tal Dingot Alkopher, 'The Social (and Religious) Meanings that Constitute War: The Crusades as Realpolitik vs. Socialpolitik,' *International Studies Quarterly,* 49 (2005): 715-737.

[81] Mark of Whitstable, OFM, Cap., *Gospel Chivalry: Franciscan Romanticism* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2006).

[82] Lawrence S. Cunningham, "Francis Naked and Clothed: A Theological Meditation," in Jay M. Hammond (ed.), *Francis of Assisi: History, Hagiography, and Hermeneutics in the Early Documents* (New City Press, 2004), 165-178, esp. 169.

[83] Jean-François Kieffer's children's comic book, *The Adventures of Loupio*, is based on the legend of how St. Francis changed the heart of a large wolf attacking the city of Gubbio, in *I Fioretti di San Francesco*, or *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* (chapter 21). In the comic book, at the time St. Francis

Scholars who argue Francis supported the crusades, and other social practices of his day ignore this holistic or integrated approach to the history, politics, theology, and spirituality of the early Franciscan movement. The way Francis, and his brothers, and Sister Clare, her sisters, and the early mendicant women performed the gospel demonstrated another way of living in the world. This was an alternative to the culture of chivalry, the civic violence *within* Italian city-states, and *between* then*,* and the violence of the crusades - with a refusal to bear arms or take oaths, two basic requirements of feudal relationships. These principles became part of the Franciscan Third Order *Rule* of 1221.[84]

## Conclusion

This article has argued that the study of history – is always to some extent also the study of contemporary politics and international relations. The reason is scholars inevitably bring their concerns about the present into their perspectives on the past. This is what makes the study of history so dynamic, important, and relevant to how we interpret our daily lives, our countries, and events in international relations. It also indicates why the study of the crusades is important. In every generation the interpretation of the crusades turns out to be influenced by contemporary international events. This is surely the case with the study of the encounter between St. Francis and Sultan al-Kamil during the Fifth Crusade, but the article argues this should be seen in perspective as part of the history of crusade historiography – and not a unique event because of the impact of the global Islamic resurgence.

---

was living in Gubbio, the wolf he changed is befriended by Loupio an orphan boy. He, like some of the older boys, dream of 'taking up the cross' (i.e. being a crusader), going to Jerusalem, and 'freeing Christ's tomb' (now the Church of the Holy Sepulchre). St. Francis takes Loupio to meet his friend Orlando who was a crusader, has returned from the Holy Land, and now ministers to those in need, and the wounded from the crusades in the Church of San Pietro. Loupio does not at first understand. He says to Orlando, 'So you no longer bear the cross?' and he replies to Loupio, 'After he met up with Francis your wolf friend was still a wolf! *I'm still carrying the cross, even if it is not so obvious*' (emphasis added). Loupio still asks him, 'But the adventure, the glory, the dream?' and Orlando replies, 'My adventure is serving my brothers for God's glory, as for the dream …. I still dream of Jerusalem …. I dream that one day the people will live there in harmony.' Jean-François Kieffer, *Les Aventures de Loupio, Tome 1: La Rencontre et autres récits* (Paris, Fleures, 2009; *The Adventures of Loupio, vol. 1, The Encounter* (San Francisco: St. Ignatius Press, 2010). This book was awarded the Children's Literature Prize by religious bookstores in 2002, and the five volumes of the series were awarded the international Christian comic book award in 2006.

[84] Ingrid Peterson, 'The Third Order of Francis,' Robson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi,* 194-195. The influential French Catholic Louis Massignon, who had been ordained a priest in the Melkite Greek Catholic Church in Cairo in 1950, sought to re-posit Francis' idea and experience in the context of the modern Christian engagement with the Muslim World in the context of Baddlliyya (mystical substitution). In 1931, Massignon became a Franciscan tertiary and took the name of "Ibrahim." On February 9, 1934, he and Mary Kahil prayed at the abandoned Franciscan church of Damietta, Egypt where the encounter took place between St. Francis and Sultan al-Kamil. Anthony O'Mahony, "Louis Massignon: A Catholic Encounter with Islam and the Middle East," in Katherine Davies and Toby Garfitt (eds.), *God's Mirror: Renewal and Engagement in French Catholic Intellectual Culture in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016) 230-252; Scott Thomas, "A Trajectory Toward the Periphery: Francis of Assisi, Louis Massignon, Pope Francis, and Muslim–Christian Relations," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 16,1 (2018): 16-36.

However, the article also argued that the study of the encounter in this way – to determine its contemporary meaning, significance, and relevance also raises questions about how it relates to the study of the *theory* of international relations. It is this missing dimension that the article starts to examine. It adopts critical approaches to the theory of international relations (i.e. the Frankfurt School), and social constructivism to argue they may offer not only Franciscan Studies a new perspective on the encounter, but also engaging with Franciscan Studies may also offer new and important perspectives on the study of international relations in the pluralistic and globalizing world of the twenty-first century.

The article argued it is it possible to establish a relationship between the Franciscan Question, and critical theory and social constructivism in the theory of international relations because both are concerned – in the past, and in the present, contrary to objective or positivist approaches to events in history or international relations, with *interpreting* events with multiple sources, interests, and perspectives. Both forms of inquiry point to the limits of historical knowing, the need for historical reflection, and the dialectics of choice – which is as concerned with understanding the present as it is the past since the very nature of what is history, and what is historical inevitably engages all of us – in interpreting the choices various actors have made in past, and in this can help us with the dialectics of choice we each face in interpreting the questions of identity, memory, agency, choice, and decision-making regarding events in contemporary politics and international relations. This is why the meaning, significance, and relevance of this encounter may be more challenging than simply using it for moral tales or lessons of history (Francis as a peacemaker, or the precursor of interreligious dialogue, etc.).

The article argued Francis and the early Franciscan movement performed the gospel life in a way that demonstrated a cultural – or, really *counter*-cultural critique of Christendom. His radicalism, however, was not the way he rejected, or opposed some of the ideas, concepts, and social practices of medieval Christendom (i.e. this is where the analogy of Francis and the 1960s hippies, drop-outs, and the counterculture breaks down), but *transformed* the accepted use, and the meanings of these ideas, concepts, and social practices, and performed the gospel in a new way that showed there was another way of living in the world – regarding spirituality, economics, and politics in medieval society. The article explained how his life story establishes the elements of a holistic and integrated "Franciscan model" of living in the world relevant to peacemaking, Muslim-Christian relations, interreligious dialogue, and international relations – encounter, conversion, knowledge, and transformation rooted in a radical "Franciscan" approach to social epistemology and social ontology in international relations. This is why the often made Franciscan conversionary elision – Francis's encounter with 'the Other,' from the leper, the poor, and the *Stigmata* to his encounter Sultan al-Kamil, is perhaps too limited with its focus on Islam and Muslim-Christian relations. His encounter with Sultan al-Kamil needs to be seen as part of this more holistic and integrative Franciscan model of international relations. He demonstrated how peace – his peace greeting, and his practice of peace in a radical, holistic and integrative way scholars can recognize has meaning and relevance at all the level of analysis in the study of international relations.